

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MANAMA 01142 091429Z

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA BAHRAIN
TO SECSTATE WASHINGTON DC 3358

S E C R E T MANAMA 1142

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS : MASS, BA

SUBJECT : MIDDLE EAST FORCE MILITARY ASSISTANCE

1. DURING MY FAREWELL CALLS AUGUST 8 BURLEIGH AND I FOUND SUBSTANTIAL IF PREDICTABLE DIFFERENCE IN SENTIMENT BETWEEN AMIR AND FOREIGN MINISTER OVER WHETHER CONTINUED U.S. NAVY PRESENCE IN BAHRAIN WOULD SERVE OVERALL US-BAHRAIN RELATIONSHIP AND GULF SECURITY GENERALLY. AMIR INDICATED DESIRE TO GET THIS PROBLEM SORTED OUT WITHIN FAMILY AND GOVERNMENT CIRCLES BY LATE AUGUST WHEN BOTH HE AND PRIME MINISTER ARE BACK IN BAHRAIN. WE ANTICIPATE SOME STRENOUS DEBATES, WITHIN REGIME INNER CIRCLE AND POSSIBLY WITHIN CABINET.

2. MEANTIME U.S. MILITARY SURVEY OF BDF HELICOPTER REQUIREMENTS IS GOING WELL SO FAR WITH TEAM HOPING TO WRAP UP WORK HERE AUGUST 10. AT THE MOMENT IT APPEARS THAT IN VERY ROUGH TERMS WHAT WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO RECOMMEND WELL WITHIN PRESENT POLICY GUIDELINES IS A PROGRAM COSTING GOB NO MORE THAN 20 MILLION DOLLARS IN FOREIGN EXCHANGE FOR EQUIPMENT, TRAINING AND MAINTENANCE SUPPORT OVER THREE YEARS (EXCLUDING CONSTRUCTION).

3. ON AN ANNUAL BASIS THIS IS ROUGHLY TWICE THE PRESENT RENT U.S. NAVY IS PAYING FOR FACILITIES IN BAHRAIN. SINCE PRIME MINISTER AND CROWN PRINCE HAVE NEVER SAID THAT THEY MIGHT EXPECT USG TO PAY ALL THE COSTS OF THEIR DEFENSE MODERNIZATION AND SINCE HELICOPTER PROGRAM SEEMS TO BE ABOUT ALL BDF CAN EASILY DIGEST FOR NEXT 2-3 YEARS, THERE WOULD SEEM TO BE SCOPE FOR NEGOTIATING

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SECRET

PAGE 02 MANAMA 01142 091429Z

2-3 YEARS EXTENSION OF MIDDLE EAST FORCE STRICTLY ON THE BASIS OF

SOME INCREASE IN NAVY RENT. IN THIS CONNECTION PRIME MINISTER'S ARGUMENT THAT THE PRESENT RENT OFFERS NO TANGIBLE EVIDENCE TO "THE PEOPLE" OF U.S. SUPPORT DOES NOT WASH SINCE ALL GOB HAS TO DO IS TELL "THE PEOPLE" ABOUT THIS U.S. SOURCE OF SUPPORT TO BAHRAIN'S BUDGET.

4. BY END OF SEPTEMBER PRIME MINISTER WILL HAVE WRAPPED UP OFFICIAL VISIT TO NEW ZEALAND AND AUSTRALIA AND HAS BEEN TOYING WITH IDEA OF COMING BACK THROUGH U.S. THIS WOULD BE OPPORTUNE TIME FOR HIM TO MAKE A WORKING VISIT TO WASHINGTON AND GOB MAY REQUEST THAT WE RECEIVE HIM. BY MID SEPTEMBER AT THE LATEST WE SHOULD HAVE A GOOD FIX ON COST PARAMETERS OF THAT PART OF BDF HELICOPTER SCHEME IN WHICH USG MIGHT BE WILLING TO TAKE PART IN TERMS OF OUR PRESENT POLICY. THEREFORE, I RECOMMEND WE DETERMINE WHETHER USG IS PREPARED TO RE-OPEN RENT NEGOTIATIONS AS THE PRICE FOR A 2-3 YEAR EXTENSION OF MIDDLE EAST FORCE PRESENCE AND BE PREPARED TO MAKE THAT SUGGESTION TO PRIME MINISTER SHOULD HE COME TO WASHINGTON.

5. OVER THE LONGER TERM, DEPARTMENT SHOULD BE AWARE CROWN PRINCE/ DEFENSE MINISTER AND HIS OFFICERS HAVE EXPRESSED TO HELICOPTER SURVEY TEAM THEIR DETERMINATION TO DEVELOP A JET FIGHTER SQUADRON ONCE HELICOPTER WING IS ESTABLISHED.

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